

VZCZCXRO7612
OO RUEHPB
DE RUEHSV #0518/01 3081857
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 041857Z NOV 07
FM AMEMBASSY SUVA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0158
INFO RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1854
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 1410
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1615
RUEHNZ/AMCONSUL AUCKLAND 0556
RUEHDN/AMCONSUL SYDNEY 0964
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHHJJAA/JICPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SUVA 000518

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/05/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [FJ](#)
SUBJECT: FIJI: INTERIM GOV'T ALLEGES ASSASSINATION PLOT

REF: SUVA 480

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D).

Summary

1. (C) Fiji military and police arrested at least 16 suspects during the weekend, allegedly for plotting to assassinate interim PM Bainimarama and other senior figures in the interim government (IG). Those arrested included the High Chief of Naitasiri Province, New Zealand businessman Ballu Khan, two retired Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) Colonels, and a senior leader of deposed PM Qarase's SDL party. Khan was badly beaten during his arrest, and Fiji authorities only reluctantly allowed NZ consular access. Police Commissioner Teleni told the media the IG has credible evidence of the plot. (Note reftel, which reported on Khan's plans for a counter-coup.) Teleni alleged some local NGOs helped fund the plot with assistance from neighboring nations. We hear interrogators of arrestees are alleging Australian, New Zealand, and U.S. involvement. Bainimarama says the RFMF remains "solid as a rock," which may be the case. However, there is no doubt many ethnic Fijians are very unhappy with the IG. Whether the arrests stifle dissent or spur it remains to be seen. An Embassy Suva EAC meeting Nov. 5 concluded that the current Public Announcement is appropriate for now. If the IG publicly alleges a USG role, we will flatly deny that. End summary.

Arrests of prominent assassination plotters

2. (C) On Saturday afternoon, Nov. 3, Fiji military and police forces at a checkpoint in suburban Suva arrested Ballu Khan with a number of bodyguards and family members. Per reftel, Khan, a prominent businessman with close connections to "Fijian nationalists," informed the Aussies a month ago that he and others were plotting to remove interim PM Bainimarama and others by force. Khan said the Qaranivalu (High Chief of Naitasiri Province), and at least four Army Colonels were co-conspirators. Later Nov. 3, the Fiji Police arrested the Qaranivalu when he sought to visit Khan. As of Monday p.m. Nov. 5, the Fiji Police said 16 suspects are in custody, undergoing interrogation. Among them are Army Col. (Ret.) Metuisela (Matt) Mua, head of Military Intelligence in the Rabuka era of the 1990s and a convicted conspirator in the 2000 coup; Col. (Ret.) Jone Baledrokadroka, former RFMF Land Forces Commander and brother-in-law of the Qaranivalu, who challenged Bainimarama's leadership in Jan. 2006 and lost; Peceli Kinivuwai, the National Director of deposed PM Qarase's SDL Party; and at least two Khan bodyguards who were members of the now-disbanded RFMF Counter-Revolutionary Warfare (CRW) group that participated in the 2000 coup and mutiny against Bainimarama. More arrests are expected.

NZ citizen severely beaten; limited access for HighComm

13. (C) According to credible sources, soldiers beat Khan and the other adult males in his party quite severely immediately on their arrest. All the adults in the Khan party were then dispersed to police stations around Suva for interrogation. Soldiers reportedly then strip-searched all, including the three women. We are told the Qaranivalu has not been beaten. Khan, born in Fiji, is a New Zealand citizen. When the NZ High Commission sought access to him, the request was refused until late Sunday morning. At that time, a NZ emboff observed that Khan had been severely beaten about the face. He could speak but not clearly. He said the military had assaulted him. Media have reported that Khan suffered a broken jaw and broken ribs. An MD who treated Khan has told the NZ HighComm that Khan does not appear to have suffered broken bones, though he was to receive a medical "scan" today. A media account on the afternoon of Nov. 5 said Khan has complained of chest pains. Subsequent NZ requests to visit Khan have been denied.

IG says credible intel led to arrests

14. (C) Police Commissioner Teleni (a senior RFMF officer until recently) has been the interim government (IG) spokesman concerning the arrests. RFMF spokesman Tikoitoga suggested the military only assisted the police because Khan and his cohort were rumored to be armed and dangerous. Teleni said the IG acted because it had developed credible intelligence of an assassination plot against Bainimarama, others in the IG, and senior military officers, utilizing firearms and explosives. A source informed us the RFMF has

SUVA 00000518 002 OF 002

audio tapes of incriminating conversations. Teleni admitted no arms or explosives have been uncovered to date. Teleni said Khan and his bodyguards were beaten while resisting arrest. (Others at the scene denied that.) Teleni said formal charges would be laid shortly. Late on Nov. 5, the Fiji Police announced they have charged three as-yet-unnamed suspects with treason, inciting mutiny, and conspiracy to murder.

Allegation NGOs, neighbors, even U.S. involved

15. (C) Teleni claimed in his public statement to have evidence that some local NGOs helped to fund the assassination plot and that some international "neighbors" funded those NGOs. Teleni added that some nations are "lurking" behind the scenes to take advantage of the situation. We have heard second-hand from a lawyer representing the Qaranivalu that an interrogator specifically sought confirmation of involvement by Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. Observers in Suva are speculating that NGO activists Angie Heffernan (PCPI) and Shamima Ali (Fiji Women's Crisis Center) will be arrested. A media source reports the list for arrest also includes deposed PM Qarase. When Qarase had a scheduled meeting with the EU heads of mission this morning, we are told he was ashen and clearly distracted.

Comment

16. (C) Interim PM Bainimarama told the media that the RFMF remains united, "solid as a rock." Nonetheless, many in Fiji are now holding their breaths. As previously reported, there has been deep disquiet within the ethnic-Fijian communities in Fiji ever since the December coup. Both the Qaranivalu and Baledrokadroka are senior chiefs. We are told the Qaranivalu recently claimed to have kept a damper on fiery Naitasiri youths who have wanted to attack Bainimarama and his IG crowd. Qarase has reported holding back his supporters from violence as well. Per reftel, Khan and the Qaranivalu have been plotting a counter-coup for at least the past month. It remains to be seen if the IG's arrests will

suppress such dissent or enflame it. Suva is quiet, with roadblocks around the Central Police Station. The Embassy held an EAC meeting today, Oct. 5, and concluded that the current Public Announcement and state of Embassy readiness remain appropriate for now.

Press guidance

17. (SBU) We have received media inquiries seeking Embassy reaction to the weekend arrests. Since the IG has not publicly attempted to tie the USG into the plot, we have not yet responded. NZ PM Clark complained publicly during the weekend about the beating received by NZ citizen Khan and about the initial lack of consular access. Today Clark went on to deny any GNZ funding for NGOs to be involved in an assassination plot. Australia FM Downer made a media statement that any claims of Australian involvement "are absurd." NGO activists Heffernan and Ali made media statements over the weekend decrying the attempt to wrap NGOs into some sort of conspiracy. As necessary, the Embassy is ready to flatly deny any USG involvement in any assassination plot, via NGOs or otherwise, and to emphasize that the U.S. continues to believe that political change in Fiji needs to take place by elections, not by coups or other forms of violence.
DINGER